



ADOT seeks alternatives to cars

Weldon B. Johnson

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In Ahwatukee, you may hear a lot of debate about the controversial South Mountain Freeway. But the often-vilified Arizona Department of Transportation also is busy seeking viable alternatives to the automobile.

To help reach that ambitious goal, ADOT has been holding a series of public meetings in Arizona to get citizen input on mass transit, commuter rail and light rail.

The last of the five gatherings will be this evening in Lake Havasu City.

The Valley's public meeting took place at the Burton Barr Branch of the Phoenix Public Library on Tuesday night.

Jim Dickey, ADOT public transportation director, led Tuesday's discussion. It focused on ways to combat traffic congestion and the "time tax" it imposes on state residents.

Opponents and proponents of light rail, commuter rail, bus service and freeways were able to voice their opinions.

The focus of the discussion was mass-transportation options, so the hot topic of the proposed South Mountain Freeway didn't come up.

Since he wasn't "the freeway guy," Dickey said he wouldn't be the right host for a forum of freeway-construction options.

Citing a study published Monday in *USA Today*, Dickey said public transportation ridership in the United States in 2006 was at its highest since 1957. The American Public Transportation Association reported that more than 10 billion trips were taken on buses and rail lines last year.

"That's about the time (1957) that the interstate highway system opened," Dickey said. "It's taken us from 1957 to today to get back to that level of public transportation ridership."

The meetings are the result of an executive order issued by Gov. Janet Napolitano on Jan. 8, which gave ADOT 90 days to come up with a detailed list of transportation options. That report is expected to be available by April 6.